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THE KINDERGARTEN-PRIMARY UNIT—PART II

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Language activities.—The kindergarten-primary period is one during which the normal child should gain sufficient control of oral and written language to be able to use both as a means of communicating and acquiring ideas. The kindergarten aims to develop on the part of children steadily increasing control of oral language as a means of communication and, with the older children, to stimulate interest in printed and written forms and a desire to understand and use them. It uses for these purposes informal conversation, oral group composition, story-telling, and other natural stimuli to reading.

Conversation.—The varied activities of the schoolroom call for the use of oral language and furnish the children natural opportunities for gaining control of this mode of communication. In addition, however, a special time is set aside for the free interchange of ideas and information concerning topics of particular interest to the children. This period is scheduled on the time program as "Conversation."

During the conversation period the children are gathered about the teacher in an informal group, conducive to a feeling of ease and sociability. They are encouraged to talk of things of immediate and special interest, for example, their toys, their plays, their trips to interesting places, what their fathers and mothers do, etc. All of the topics which come up in this fashion are not equally valuable, but the teacher, especially at first and with the younger and more timid children, encourages expression concerning almost any interest and by tactful guidance leads it into profitable channels.

The children are especially free and spontaneous in talking about toys and other objects which they have brought from home to exhibit to the teacher and other children. Early in the year the things brought make a rather miscellaneous collection, but soon the children begin bringing objects related to the projects

which are being carried on or to the interests which have been aroused in the classroom; for example, a sample package of some cereal for the grocery store, a toy telephone for the playhouse, material to make clothes for the doll, autumn leaves or berries gathered on a week-end trip, pictures suggested by school work and play, and food for the rabbit. These contributions often serve to recall work done the day before and lead to discussion of plans for today. This is not left to chance, however. The teacher uses part of this time to suggest ideas to which she wishes to direct attention. If these are carefully selected and presented, they bring equally spontaneous response. From the point of view of language training the important thing is that the teacher create situations which will stimulate free expression. She may then correct the child's use of English when necessary, help him in his choice of words and phrases, encourage him to use complete sentences and to enunciate clearly so that he may be understood.

Group composition.—A short daily period, of about fifteen minutes, devoted to conversation concerning things of vital interest to the particular group of children, serves to supplement and helps to organize experiences gained through other activities at the same time that it gives training in oral expression. As the children gradually overcome any natural shyness and begin to express themselves with some degree of freedom, the teacher may help them to further organization of their ideas through group composition. This may take the form of a letter to an absent schoolmate or some other friend of the children or to another class, a story about an interesting picture, an account of an excursion, or a description of some work done by the children. After discussing with the children some of the facts and ideas which they would like or need to include in such a composition, the teacher may lead them to express their ideas in complete sentences and to arrange the sentences in somewhat logical fashion.

The following letters composed by the children explain themselves.

April 11, 1919

DEAR MR. HEATH:

Thank you for the hen that you lent to us. She is sitting on her eggs now. She is in a barrel. The barrel is in the kindergarten room under the window sill.

Lovingly,

THE KINDERGARTEN

May 1, 1919

DEAR MR. HEATH:

Five chickens have hatched. Two hatched on Monday, two hatched on Tuesday, and one hatched on Wednesday, so five were out on Thursday. One is dark yellow and four are light yellow.

The Mother Hen is Henny Penny. One of the little chickens is Chicken Little. The dark one is Darky. One of the other little chickens is Little Tup-pens, one is Betty and the other is Tommy.

Lovingly,
THE KINDERGARTEN

Here is a very simple story suggested by a picture shown at the time the children were taking care of the hen and chicks referred to in the letters quoted above. The quotation is a song which the children had recently learned.

The little chickens are coming to eat and so is the mother hen.
The boy wants his little sister to see the hen and the little chickens eat.
The boy is saying:

Come chick, chick, chick,
Come chick, chick, chick,
Here is food for you to eat.
Come chick, chick, chick,
Come chick, chick, chick,
It's fine and soft and sweet.

The baby and boy are sitting on the back steps.

When the children were fitting up a grocery store in the fall, they were shown one morning a picture of two children playing store. After the children had commented freely on the picture the suggestion was made that they write a story about it for their story book. They talked it over further for the purpose of getting variety of expression and of organizing the material and then the teacher wrote the following sentences at the children's dictation.

Tom and Betty are playing grocery store.
Betty has come to buy.
Betty has her mother's hat and pocketbook.
There are apples, bananas, and cornflakes for sale.
Tom is the grocery man.

The first stories and descriptions are usually composed of very simple sentences which are similar in structure. Gradually the compositions become longer, more complex in sentence structure, and show command of a larger vocabulary. Following is an example.

OUR TRIP TO THE FIRE-ENGINE HOUSE

We went to see the fire-engine house.

When we first went in we looked at the fire-engine.

Then we looked at the horses.

The horses' names were Baby, Dolly, Brandenburg, and Nigger.

One of the horses did tricks.

We went upstairs and saw where the firemen sleep.

A fireman said, "When the fire bell rings at night the firemen jump into their boots and slide down the brass poles."

We went downstairs and when the bell rang the firemen came down the brass poles.

Then the horses opened the doors and came out from their stables to be hitched up.

Then they went back to their stables after they were unhitched.

These group compositions are printed or typewritten, and either pasted in a large scrapbook and kept in school to be re-read and enjoyed from time to time, or they are duplicated and each child pastes a copy in an individual book which he has made and may take home. If the composition is a story about a picture it is pasted opposite the picture. If it is a description or a record, it is illustrated with drawings made by the children or with pictures brought by them which serve to illustrate the subject.

This type of work, apart from its value as a means of organizing thought and training in expression, is one of the best devices which the kindergarten may use to establish a desirable attitude on the part of the child toward books and other printed material. Children who have contributed to such a composition, have then seen the teacher write it, have seen it next day in printed or typewritten form, have heard the teacher read it again, and have finally pasted a copy of it into a book of their own construction which may be taken home and read by the other members of the family, are likely to have a much more intelligent interest in books than before such a series of experiences.

Stories and poetry.—The child's progress in control of language is greatly facilitated by excellent models. Just as he acquires new words, modes of expression, and correct usage through imitation of his elders, so he may be further helped by opportunity to become familiar with bits of the literature of childhood found chiefly in folk and fairy tales and Mother Goose rhymes. The children in the kindergarten commit to memory about ten or twelve of the Mother Goose rhymes and they become very familiar with many

more. Thus certain words, phrases, and poetic modes of expression become their own.

From the mass of available folk and fairy tales a careful selection of twelve or fifteen is made. The stories chosen are characterized by simple structure, interesting action, sound organization, and a happy ending.

Through repeated hearing of these stories well told the children acquire a feeling for good literary form which aids them in their own efforts to organize ideas. They are aided further by playing out some of the stories with toys, by dramatizing a few of the short ones and by illustrating with crayon or clay. The poems and stories are sometimes read to the children and they in turn "read" many of these same stories and rhymes through the pictures in the illustrated books, thus learning to associate oral presentation, graphic illustration, and printed symbols.

Furthermore, among the stories with which the children become perfectly familiar are many of those which will be used as reading material in the first grade.

Other stimuli to reading.—The teachers in the kindergarten take advantage of the many other opportunities which occur in the ordinary life of the school to stimulate interest in written and printed forms. For example, each child has a locker in which his outdoor wraps are to be kept. Instead of marking these with bits of paper of different colors and forms, or with pictures, as is often done with children who cannot read, each child is given a slip of paper on which his name is clearly written or printed. He pastes this on the door of his locker and is urged to look at it carefully so that he will learn to recognize it. If he fails to do this in the course of a few days he is given a duplicate slip to help him to find his name. It is not many days before he becomes quite independent of such help. Sometimes an individual child will become interested enough to familiarize himself with the printed names of other children.

The children have access to the material cupboards and usually help themselves to the materials they need. They learn to recognize the shape of the box in which a particular material is kept unless there are several boxes of the same form and size. When this is the case the boxes are clearly labelled and the older children soon learn to distinguish between such words as scissors, paste, crayons, etc.

When the children make plans for their constructions, naming objects they will make or materials they will need, or when they choose three or four games which they would like to play in succession, these are listed on the blackboard by the teacher. Of course the children do not read these lists but they appreciate their value to one who can read them. If anything is not to be erased by the janitor when he washes the boards the word *save* is written. The children soon learn to recognize this word and sometimes a child will teach himself to write it.

Signs of one sort or another often give a most realistic touch to the children's constructions and at the same time emphasize again the importance of these symbols; for example, names of streets on the lamp posts in the miniature community, names on different buildings in this same community such as Fire Department, Garage, Grocery Store, and Post Office, and traffic signs such as Stop and Go.

Enough illustrations have been given to indicate the possibilities in this direction. Through these and similar devices the children are helped to realize the general function of the numerous symbols with which they are surrounded and are soon eager to interpret them.

Reading in the first grade.—Children who have had experiences of the types described in this and the previous article go to the first grade well prepared for systematic instruction in reading. They have acquired the habits and made the other fundamental social adjustments which are necessary to happy and profitable school life. They have developed interests in the varied activities of the school and have acquired a fund of valuable ideas through association with teacher and children in carrying forward the various forms of construction and play provided by the kindergarten program. They are able to use these ideas in solving the simple problems which arise in connection with their various individual enterprises. They have gained sufficient command of oral language to make their thoughts and feelings known and have learned to listen to and understand most of what other persons say to them. And, finally, they have been introduced, in a variety of interesting and significant ways, to a new form of communication, viz., the written and printed word and sentence.

As has been said, when children enter first grade *without* these preparatory experiences, considerable time must be spent in

acquiring them before reading can be taught successfully. On the other hand, children who have had these necessary preliminary experiences are ready to continue each type of activity on a higher level and eager to begin at once to acquire control of these new language forms, i.e., to learn to read and write.

The first-grade teacher who is working with the children who have come from the kindergarten makes use of this awakened desire, from the beginning, to help the children associate the written and printed forms with the particular oral words and sentences which they represent, these, in turn, being selected from vivid and interesting schoolroom activities. For example, directions for rhythmic play are written on the board, as they are spoken, such as run, skip, hop, etc. Later such directions are written only and numerous games are played involving the recognition of these and similar words and phrases. Such directions as "Girls, skip to the chairs," "Group 1, run to the group room," etc., are also given in writing.

The "incidental" reading begun in the kindergarten is continued in a variety of ways. The children themselves suggest the labeling of objects when it is necessary and the writing of lists of things to be remembered. They are prepared also to make immediate and intelligent use of such devices as the "bulletin board" and picture charts.

The children are told that the bulletin board will contain something new and important every day; so they hasten to examine it as soon as they arrive in the morning. Following are some of the items which have appeared from time to time on the bulletin board in the first grade: "We shall go to the garden," accompanied by an appropriate picture; "We shall not go out today," accompanied by a rainy day picture; "Today is Monday"; "We go to assembly today"; "One week to Christmas!"

While the children were reading the rhymes "Jack and Jill," a picture of a boy appeared one day with the sentence, "This is Jack," below it. The following day it was replaced by a picture of a girl with the statement, "This is Jill."

After the children had begun reading the story "The Little Red Hen," the following sentences with appropriate pictures were seen on four successive days: "This is the little red hen." "This is the pig." "This is the dog." "This is the cat." When a child is

unable to make out the sentence on the bulletin board he gets help from another child or from the teacher.

The picture charts contain pictures of related objects with the name of each below it. These are objects which are significant because of their connection with the central interests and projects. In the autumn, when the children are interested in life and work on the farm, there is a chart containing pictures of all the different farm animals, another containing pictures of fruits, one of vegetables, and one of grains and grain products. In December pictures of Santa Claus, a Christmas tree, and a variety of toys appear on the chart. These are all examples of suggestions and invitations to read which have proved stimulating and helpful.

The work in group composition and in story-telling, begun in the kindergarten, is continued in the first grade, but on a level commensurate with the maturity of the children. The ability in oral composition which has been acquired in the kindergarten is also utilized by the first-grade teacher in leading the children to formulate language units for chart reading lessons. The children have learned that writing is another way of saying what one wishes to say and they know the difference between words as they appear in lists or columns and as they are arranged in sentences. They are ready, therefore, to concentrate attention upon the particular forms which represent the sentences they themselves have formulated, or the sentences which make up the rhymes and stories with which they are familiar. Such nursery rhymes as "Jack and Jill," "Jack Be Nimble," etc., together with their own compositions, comprise the first reading material. The following are a few examples of the many chart reading lessons composed by the children and used as reading material during the fall. They show some of the typical activities and interests of the first three months.

GOLDFISH

We have two fish.
They are goldfish.
They are big.
We feed them.

OUR STREET

We are making a street.
We made some houses.
We made some lamp posts.
We shall plant grass seed.

THE FARM

We shall make a barn.
We shall make a house.
We shall make a road.
We shall plant wheat.
We shall plant corn.
We shall plant grass seed.

MUFFINS

We had some wheat seed.
We ground the wheat.
It made white flour.
We sifted the flour.
We shall have muffins made.
We shall eat them.

BUTTER

We made some butter.
We put cream in a churn.
We churned the cream.
It turned to butter.
We shall eat it on our muffins.

CHRISTMAS STORY

Jack wrote a letter.
It was to Santa Claus.
He put it in the fireplace.
The letter said, "Dear Santa Claus,
Please bring me a drum."

When the children have learned through reading from the blackboard and from charts to associate the whole line with the sentence which they have spoken or thought and to direct the eye movement from left to right, and when they have acquired a small reading vocabulary and have gained some skill in interpreting words and phrases through thinking of the content, their place in the line, and through whatever help the picture charts can give them, they are given the familiar stories to read from books, such stories as "The Little Red Hen," "The Gingerbread Boy," and "Johnny and the Goats."

They continue, however, to formulate much of their own reading material. Eventually, through work in phonic analysis, they gain further power of interpreting new material. This power increases steadily as the teaching of reading goes forward through the three primary grades; silent reading is given a larger and larger place, and by the time they have finished the third grade these children have become relatively independent, intelligent, and rapid readers.

These descriptions of the work in manual and language activities through the kindergarten and first grade illustrate the method by which unification is secured through a carefully organized curriculum. A description of work in each of the other phases of the curriculum would serve the same purpose.

Classification and promotion.—A final factor in the adjustment between the kindergarten and first grade is that of classification and promotion. Children who enter the school between the ages of five and six years are assigned to the kindergarten. After the first two or three weeks they are classified in two groups for most of the work in language and manual activities. Singing and games may be carried on to advantage with the entire class.

By the first of January those children who, in the judgment of the teachers, are sufficiently mature to be taught reading to advantage, are organized in a special group for this purpose. The children's response to the type of work described above under *Other Stimuli to Reading* enables the teachers to determine with a good deal of accuracy which children are ready for systematic instruction in reading. If, however, subsequent experience shows that any one or more of the children are not prepared for this work, it is a very simple matter to return such children to the kindergarten group.

The first-grade children now come at 8:45 and stay until 12:00 as do the other first-grade classes, instead of from 9:00 to 11:30, which are the kindergarten hours. The program is so arranged that they continue to have singing, games, and some of the language work with the kindergarten children, but go to their own classroom for manual activities and reading. In October of the next year these children are ready for IA work and are promoted to a IA class. Among the other kindergarten children who are ready for promotion, some are more advanced than others and are placed accordingly in one of the two or three IB groups.

Similarly, entering children between six and seven years of age are assigned to that group to which they belong as nearly as this can be determined in consultation with the parents, but the organization is elastic enough to allow for all desirable reclassification during the first weeks of the term. Thus while age is a determining factor in the first classification of the children entering the elementary school for the first time, reclassification and promotion are administered in terms of physical and mental maturity rather than actual age.